

# CIVILIAN-MILITARY INTERACTION ON THE MATIE CAMPUS: THE ‘BATTLE OF WILGENHOF’, 1957

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## **Abstract**

The South African Military Academy was established in 1950 as a branch of the SA Military College, under the academic auspices of the University of Pretoria. A mere three years later, in 1953, the Union Defence Force decided to relocate the Academy to Saldanha and to establish it as an independent military unit under the wings of Stellenbosch University. The relocation process took place during 1955/1956, shortly after construction of the Academy buildings at Saldanha had started. As a result, Stellenbosch University agreed to accommodate the Academy staff and students on the mother campus until the facilities at Saldanha were completed. However, not all civilian students welcomed the military students on the Matie campus, which culminated in the so-called ‘Battle of Wilgenhof’ in 1957. This article investigates the origins, extent, outcome and consequences of the conflict between military and civilian students on the campus of Stellenbosch University in the mid-1950s. It contends that the conflict was rooted in cultural rather than political differences, that the antagonism towards the military students was in essence restricted to the residents of Wilgenhof and that the ‘Battle of Wilgenhof’ had no lasting impact on the interaction between military and civilian students at Stellenbosch University.

## **Introduction**

In 1957, conflict flared up between Military Academy students and their civilian co-inhabitants of Wilgenhof Residence at Stellenbosch culminating in the so-called

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‘Battle of Wilgenhof’. More than a decade later, in 1968, Dr Appies du Toit, the primarius of Wilgenhof in 1957 laid the blame for this incident squarely at the door of the military students. He wrote:

Dagbreek, Huis Marais and Huis Visser... each already had their turn in suffering from the presence of the military students ... the military students ... had, as we knew, always caused trouble ... wherever they were placed. There was so much discord at the University of Pretoria that the authorities refused to accommodate them any longer. So Stellenbosch got them and their presence wrecked the spirit of one residence after the other.

The aim behind the presence of the military at university, so we understood, was to remove the stigma that the Afrikaner had attached to a soldier’s uniform since the Second World War. By going to university, being students and living like students, future officers, and thus also the Defence Force, would acquire a higher standing for themselves and also become more acceptable to the Afrikaner. Unfortunately, the Defence Force’s so-called *esprit de corps* and the poor material with which they had to achieve their aims handicapped them in this regard. The efforts to make a true student out of a “student officer” failed dismally...<sup>1</sup>

The aim of this article is to explore the relationship between the students of the Military Academy and their civilian peers on the campus of Stellenbosch University during the late 1950s, with particular reference to the ‘Battle of Wilgenhof’ against the background of Du Toit’s disparaging pronouncement a decade after the event. The article firstly outlines the historical estrangement of the Afrikaner from the Union Defence Force (UDF) before 1948 very briefly. Thereafter it sketches Defence Minister F.C. Erasmus’s efforts to ‘Afrikanerise’ the UDF and explains how the Military Academy fitted into that scheme. Next, the relationship between the Military Academy students and their civilian counterparts in Pretoria and the reason for the termination of the affiliation of the Military Academy to the University of Pretoria is investigated. Following that, the article addresses the attachment of the Military Academy to Stellenbosch University, the accommodation of the Academy staff and students on the main campus at Stellenbosch and the general relationship between the military and civilian students on campus. The article culminates in an analysis of the origins, course and consequences of the ‘Battle of Wilgenhof’, 1957.

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1. A. du Toit. 1968. Moeilikheid met die “Army”. In O. Potgieter (ed.). *Wilgenhof Gedenkboek (1903–1967)*. Stellenbosch: Wilgenhof, p. 75. (Author’s translation.)

### **The Afrikaner and the Union Defence Force: estrangement and reconciliation**

Du Toit is correct about the 'stigma' that the Afrikaner 'had attached to a soldier's uniform', but it started long before the Second World War. It is well known that some Afrikaners strongly disliked the perceived 'Britishness' of the Union Defence Force that emerged after unification in 1910. South Africa's participation in the First World War on the side of Great Britain, the hated former Boer enemy, produced the ill-fated Afrikaner Rebellion of 1914/15, the suppression of which by the UDF drove a huge wedge between the Defence Force and a significant portion of the Afrikaners. The Smuts government's entry of the Second World War as a British ally, together with the subsequent suppressive security measures against perceived anti-war Afrikaners, including large-scale internments, disarmament of civilians, and restrictive measures against the Ossewa Brandwag, the Afrikaner Broederbond and other organisations, increased the Afrikaner-UDF divide significantly.<sup>2</sup> Several violent confrontations took place during the war between anti-war supporters and soldiers or policemen, including on the campuses of the traditional Afrikaans universities in Pretoria, Potchefstroom and Stellenbosch.<sup>3</sup> Many Afrikaners saw the UDF as a tool of the British Empire and would have nothing to do with it after the Second World War.<sup>4</sup>

The National Party steered the UDF on a completely new course after its ballot box victory in 1948. Defence Minister F.C. Erasmus wanted to draw the Nationalist Afrikaner into the UDF to take up his rightful place alongside his English-speaking counterpart and shoulder his traditional responsibility as defender of his fatherland. To achieve this, the UDF had to adopt a unique South African character with which the Afrikaner could identify. Erasmus realised that it was above all proper training and education that would enable the Afrikaner to take up his rightful place in the UDF. Hence, he established the Military Academy in 1950 as a vehicle with which to feed the UDF with young officers militarily trained and academically educated not only to meet the challenges of the future, but also to transform it into the

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2. For detail see G.E. Visser. 2002. British influence on military training and education in South Africa: The case of the South African Military Academy and its predecessors. *South African Historical Journal* 46, May, pp. 63–73; H. Giliomee. 2003. *The Afrikaners: Biography of a People*. Cape Town: Tafelberg, pp. 379–384, 440–446; and A.M. Fokkens. 2006. The Role and Application of the Union Defence Force in the Suppression of Internal Unrest, 1912 – 1945. Unpublished MA thesis, Stellenbosch University, pp. 93–124, 128–130.
  3. Fokkens, The Role and Application of the Union Defence, pp. 113–115.
  4. Visser, British influence on military training and education in South Africa, p. 73.

Afrikaner-dominated force he had in mind. To achieve the latter aim, he carefully selected politically correct students, staff members and curricula.<sup>5</sup>

Du Toit was thus correct in claiming that the Minister of Defence saw the Military Academy as an instrument to assist him in popularising the UDF amongst the Afrikaner people. He was also correct in stating that university education was an effort to 'acquire a higher standing' for UDF officers; the Department of Defence stated clearly indeed that an important aim with the attainment of a university degree was to place UDF officers on an equal footing with professional people in the civilian sector.<sup>6</sup> These two aims were, however, by no means the only or even the main aims with the establishment of the Military Academy, as Du Toit seems to imply. The decision to commit prospective officers to a university education was in the first place informed by professional considerations, particularly the provision of a sound intellectual base to equip future officers for their complex task in the nuclear age. When he announced the establishment of the Military Academy, Erasmus stated that the establishment of the Military Academy was the 'result of the modern approach to advanced military training ... in view of the rapid advances in the field of science, which have resulted in, and still regularly lead to, remarkable developments in military arms [and] equipment'.<sup>7</sup> The Academy would thus provide 'higher academic and technical training ... [to] future regular officers ... to fit them for the demands of modern warfare'.<sup>8</sup> Since the aim was, furthermore, to elevate officer training and education in the UDF to international standards, the Academy would be established 'on similar lines to Sandhurst in England and West Point in the United States'.<sup>9</sup>

### **The 'break' with the University of Pretoria**

The Military Academy opened its doors on 1 April 1950 as part of SA Military College at Voortrekkerhoogte (currently Thaba Tshwane) in Pretoria. The above-mentioned academic aims, however, made the affiliation of the Military Academy

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5. Ibid., pp. 74–80.

6. South African National Defence Force Archives (hereafter SANDFA), CGS (WAR) 281, 56/36, Acting CGS – Min. of Defence, 22 March 1949; SANDFA, SA Mil. Col. (Gp. 1) 164, MC/T/12/1, Comdt SA Mil. Col – Dir. Policy Coordination, 27 May 1949; SANDFA, AG(3) 222, AG(3)1906/9 vol. 1, Acting Sec. for Defence – Min. of Defence, 5 July 1949.

7. Anon. 1949. SA Military Academy to be Formed Soon. *The Rand Daily Mail*, 19 August.

8. Ibid.

9. Anon. 1949. Union to have Military Academy Next Year. *The Star*, 18 August.

with an existing civilian university imperative, since financial and administrative constraints ruled out the establishment of the Academy as an independent military university. The founders of the Military Academy initially intended a loose affiliation with the University of South Africa (Unisa) to ensure maximum independence for the Academy,<sup>10</sup> but the Rector of the University of Pretoria, Prof. C.H. Rautenbach, intervened forcefully and effected an affiliation with his institution instead.<sup>11</sup> The National Party government thus did not force the Military Academy down the throat of the University of Pretoria, as Du Toit seems to suggest; the University of Pretoria indeed went out of its way to achieve an affiliation between the two institutions. Of course, the University of Pretoria was a leading Afrikaner university and as such certainly suited Erasmus's political ideals for the Academy better than did Unisa.

It was the intention of the military authorities that the cadets should participate fully in all student activities<sup>12</sup> on the campus of the University of Pretoria, and they promised their full support to facilitate such participation. The idea was undoubtedly to enhance the social development of the cadets and to foster a good relationship between the general public and the UDF in the long run. The Students' Council in turn undertook to do everything in their power to integrate the military students fully into the normal student life, but emphasised that since 'they are first-years at our University we expect the same respect for seniors and student council members from them than from all other first-years'.<sup>13</sup> No evidence could be found that the Academy students ever violated this tradition.

In practice, full integration of the Academy students with the civilian student community was impossible. The Academy students were obligated to stay at the South African Military College instead of in student residences on campus. They had, furthermore, to attend their classes in uniform, which made them stand out as a separate group. They could, moreover, not participate in sports competitions at club level with their civilian colleagues as members of university sports teams, since they

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10. SANDFA, CGS (WAR) 281, 56/36, Dir. Policy Coordination – Rector UP, 10 October 1949; SANDFA, MV/EF 135, MV130, Lt Col C.F. Miles-Cadman – Min. F.C. Erasmus, 22 November 1949.

11. SANDFA, CGS (WAR) 281, 56/36, Rector UP – Private Sec. Min. of Defence, 1 October 1949; SANDFA, CGS (WAR) 281, 56/36, Rector UP – Dir. Policy Coordination, 1 October 1949.

12. SANDFA, SA Mil. Col. (Gp. 1) 51, MK/T/12/3, Acting Comdt SA Mil. Col. – Chair Student Representative Council UP, April 1950.

13. SANDFA, SA Mil. Col. (Gp. 1) 51, MK/T/12/3, Sec. Representative Students' Council UP – Acting Comdt SA Mil. Col., 11 May 1950.

were only entitled to medical benefits in the case of sports injuries if such injuries were sustained during an organised military sports meeting. The Academy students were therefore obliged to carry out their sports activities within the UDF context, but there was an understanding that approval would be given by way of an exception for cadets to represent the university at interuniversity sports competitions.<sup>14</sup> The exclusion of the cadets from university sports robbed them of an important 'catalyst'<sup>15</sup> in the social integration process on campus.

Despite these obstacles to social integration, the Academy students participated eagerly in the usual dance parties and other student activities on campus. The most important interaction between the military and civilian students, however, was the annual rag with the associated raft-building and street processions. The cadets participated with great enthusiasm and built their own raft every year. There was no lack of resourcefulness amongst them and they won a consolation prize with their first raft in 1950. In 1951, they won the first prize with their 'Trojan horse' and in 1952 they received a special prize for the 'Desert Fox'. With the Mau-Mau crisis a hot item in international news, the cadets subsequently won an award for their raft, which portrayed the uprising as a meowing (Mau-Mau) black cat threatened by a huge bulldog.<sup>16</sup>

Even if no complete integration was achieved between the military and civilian students in Pretoria, Du Toit's claim that Stellenbosch University 'got' the Military Academy because 'there was so much discord at the University of Pretoria that authorities refused to accommodate them any longer' is without any foundation whatsoever. No evidence could be found in the archives of the UDF and the University of Pretoria of conflict between the military and civilian students on the campus of the University of Pretoria. Gen. Magnus Malan, former Chief of the SA Defence Force and subsequently Minister of Defence, one of the first 30 cadets who enrolled at the Academy in 1950, does recall, however, that the men in uniform were not always greeted with enthusiasm by their male civilian compatriots and that

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14. SANDFA, SA Mil. Col. (Gp. 1) 51, MK/T/12/3, Acting Comdt SA Mil. Col. – Chair Representative Students' Council UP, April 1950; SANDFA, SA Mil. Col. (Gp. 1) 86, MK/F/6/3, training of career officers at Mil. Acad., 4 November 1952.

15. I.R. Gleeson – G.E. Visser, interview, Pretoria, 21 November 1994; M.A. de M. Malan - G.E. Visser, interview, Pretoria, 24 November 1994.

16. N.M. Lemmer - G.E. Visser, interview, Saldanha, 1 March 1994; I.R. Gleeson – G.E. Visser, interview, Pretoria, 21 November 1994; M.A. de M. Malan - G.E. Visser, interview, Pretoria, 24 November 1994; E.L. Bekker – G.E. Visser, interview, Saldanha Bay, 24 March 1999.

friction sometimes did occur. On such occasions, the small group of military students closed ranks and refused to be intimidated by the overwhelming superiority of numbers against them.<sup>17</sup> Lt. Gen. I.R. (Ian) Gleeson, an English-speaking member of the 1954 Military Academy intake, on the other hand, is of the opinion that the Academy students were well received on campus by their civilian counterparts because they looked smart in their uniforms and the other students knew that they had a little more money to spend than most ordinary students. The cadets of course missed no opportunity to make closer contact with the girls on campus – to which end their superior financial resources came in very handy – and some of them actually met their future wives there!<sup>18</sup>

The true reason for the Academy's disconnection from the University of Pretoria and its subsequent affiliation with Stellenbosch University is to be found in organisational bickering within the UDF itself. As the Military Academy had not really been the brainchild of Defence Headquarters (DHQ), but rather of Defence Minister F.C. Erasmus, the UDF officers' corps never really accepted ownership of the Academy. Many senior officers in fact viewed it with suspicion and even animosity, since most of them had not enjoyed the privilege of a university education and felt threatened by this new development. As far as the latter were concerned, they were doing well without university degrees and thus saw no use for it. Amidst this resistance, no clear policy emerged for the progressive development of the Military Academy, and Defence Headquarters, together with the Academy's supposed guardian, the SA Military College, neglected it to the point that there was a real danger that the Academy would be closed down. The Dean of the Military Academy, Maj. Melt van Niekerk, consequently worked very hard to convince the UDF to establish the Military Academy as an independent unit in order to allow it to develop purposefully and to achieve its full potential in accordance with international standards. Since only army and air force officers could be trained in Pretoria, Van Niekerk pushed for a coastal location to facilitate the admittance of naval candidates as well. Thanks to the personal intervention of Minister Erasmus, DHQ decided in 1953 to detach the Military Academy from the SA Military College and the University of Pretoria with effect from 1 February 1956, and to re-establish it as an independent military unit at Saldanha Bay under the academic trusteeship of Stellenbosch University.<sup>19</sup>

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17. M.A. de M. Malan - G.E. Visser, interview, Pretoria, 24 November 1994.

18. I.R. Gleeson – G.E. Visser, interview, Pretoria, 21 November 1994.

19. G.E. Visser. 2002. Image and identity in military education. *Society in Transition: Journal of the South African Sociological Association* 33(1), May, pp. 176–177; G.E. Visser. *Marrying Sparta and Athens: The South African*

The University of Pretoria never approached the UDF to terminate the affiliation of the Military Academy to that university, and the UDF never discussed the cessation of the relationship with the university authorities. After the successful conclusion of the negotiations with Stellenbosch University, the Chief of the General Staff, Lt. Gen. Matie du Toit, accompanied by the service chiefs of staff, personally paid a visit to the Rector of the University of Pretoria, Prof. C.H. Rautenbach, to inform him about these developments and to explain the introduction of joint junior officer training for all three services as the motivation behind the move. Although the 1955 Military Academy intake had already enrolled at Stellenbosch University, the cooperation with the University of Pretoria continued until the end of 1957<sup>20</sup> when the last group of students that enrolled at that institution completed their studies. The Academy set itself up temporarily at Stellenbosch in February 1956, pending the erection of suitable facilities at Saldanha. The move to Saldanha took place in December 1957 and the Academy started to function at its new location at the beginning of 1958.<sup>21</sup>

Though not the main objective of the affiliation of the Military Academy with Stellenbosch University, Erasmus's aim of popularising the UDF amongst the Afrikaners certainly played a role in that venture. Stellenbosch University was in the words of its Rector, Prof. H.B. Thom, 'a people's university born from the distress of the Afrikaner people, made strong by the Afrikaner people and still served the Afrikaner people and had to carry the heart of the [Afrikaner] people within it, safeguard its sacred values and continue to provide leadership to the Afrikaner people'.<sup>22</sup> Thom would therefore have been extremely sympathetic towards Erasmus's Afrikaner ideals for the UDF and later indeed referred to his 'hearty cooperation with Adv. Frans Erasmus in connection with the creation of the

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Military Academy and task-orientated junior officer development in peace and war. *Journal for Contemporary History* 27(3), December, pp. 189–190. See also P.S. du Toit. 1966. Fakulteite sedert 1954 ingestel. In H.B. Thom, *et al.* (eds.). *Stellenbosch 1866–1966: Honderd Jaar Hoër Onderwys*. Cape Town: Nasionale Boekhandel, p. 153.

20. Universiteit van Pretoria. 1960. *Ad Destinatum: Gedenkboek van die Universiteit van Pretoria*. Johannesburg: Voortrekkerpers, p. 108.

21. Visser, Image and identity in military education, pp. 176–177; Visser, Marrying Sparta and Athens, pp. 189–190.

22. H.B. Thom. 1969. Stellenbosch as ware Volksuniversiteit. In D.J. Kotzé, *et al.* (eds.). *Professor H.B. Thom*. Stellenbosch: Universiteit van Stellenbosch, pp. 77, 78, 79. (Author's translation.)



Faculty of Military Science at the University of Stellenbosch and the establishment of the Military Academy at Saldanha Bay'.<sup>23</sup>

### **Military students accommodated in civilian residences**

Stellenbosch University could not provide office accommodation to the Military Academy personnel on campus during their temporary lodgement on the university campus. The UDF therefore rented office space from the United Building Society on the first floor of the UBS building in Plein Street, close to the campus.<sup>24</sup> Partially under the pressure of circumstance, the UDF took the integration of the military students with their civilian counterparts at Stellenbosch a step further than in Pretoria. Since there was no military accommodation available at Stellenbosch, but, also to integrate them as well as possible with student life,<sup>25</sup> the 1955 Military Academy intake (32 students) took up residence with their civilian counterparts in Dagbreek, one of the university residences. The military authorities had requested, for practical purposes, that all military students be accommodated in the same residence, but agreed that they could be dispersed among the civilian students within the residence rather than being kept together as a separate group. All male first-years were in any case centralised in Dagbreek since 1954 according to the University's 'first-year adaptive system' to help them find their feet on campus before they were integrated with the senior students from their second year.<sup>26</sup>

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23. Mil. Acad. (Gp. 4) 104, MA/512/2/1/6 DEC 80 vol. 2, Prof. H.B. Thom – OC Mil. Acad., 3 November 1980. (Author's translation.)
  24. SANDFA, AG(3) 223, AG(3)1906/9 vol. 4, Acting AG – QMG, 26 October 1955; SANDFA, Mil. Acad. (Gp. 2) 35, Q/ACCN/1 vol. 1, OC Mil. Acad. – QMG, 5 March 1956; SANDFA, AG(3) 224, AG(3)1906/9 vol. 6, OC Mil. Acad. – QMG, 12 April 1955; P.J.G. de Vos. 1975. *Die Militêre Akademie, 1956–1967*. In E.M. Müller, *et al.* (eds.). *Military Academy 1950–1975: Silver Jubilee*. Saldanha: Military Academy, p. 17.
  25. SANDFA, AG(3) 224, AG(3)1906/9 vol. 5, Maj. Gen. H.B. Klopper – Mil. Advisor, 2 December 1955; SANDFA, KG K43 L81, KG/GPT/1/3/1/1 vol. 5, OC Mil. Acad. – CG, 28 May 1957.
  26. SANDFA, AG(3) 223, AG(3)1906/9 vol. 2, Lt J.J. Wahl – Comdt G.H.F. Markgraaff, n.d. (February 1955); SANDFA, AG(3) 223, AG(3)1906/9 vol. 2, AG – OC Cape Command, 10 February 1955; SANDFA, AG(3) 223, AG(3)1906/9 vol. 4, Training Officer Western Province Aarea – AG, 16 August 1955; D. Kotzé. 1968. *Die Geskiedenis van Wilgenhof*. In O. Potgieter (ed.). *Wilgenhof Gedenkboek (1903–1967)*. Stellenbosch: Wilgenhof, p. 27.

The discipline and morale of the candidate officers and midshipmen dropped markedly subsequent to their arrival at Stellenbosch. This, in the opinion of the Training Officer of Western Province Area, Lt. A.B. du Preez, was inter alia due to the 'licentious' residence life that was quite inappropriate to prospective officers. He consequently recommended that from 1956 when there would be both first- and second-year military students on campus (since the Academy buildings at Saldanha would not be completed yet) and their numbers would reach about 60, the soldiers be accommodated in a separate residence.<sup>27</sup> DHQ supported Du Preez's proposal,<sup>28</sup> but if they indeed appealed to the University in that regard, they were unsuccessful. The military students were split between two residences in 1956, with the first-years in Huis Visser and the second-years in Huis Marais.<sup>29</sup> A crisis arose in 1957 when the Academy buildings at Saldanha were still not completed and all three military year-groups had to be accommodated at Stellenbosch.<sup>30</sup> The new first-years were consequently housed in Wilgenhof, while the second- and third-years stayed on in Huis Visser and Huis Marais.<sup>31</sup> When the second- and third-years were relocated to Saldanha with effect from 1958, the University, with the agreement of DHQ, decided to make *Crozier House* exclusively available for the accommodation of the military first-years. Although the initiative came from the University this time, it was exactly what the UDF wanted, as indicated above. *Crozier House* was actually a private residence; the building and furniture belonged to the University who leased it to one Miss S. Volschenk to operate on a profit basis. According to Col. P.J.G. de Vos, the Dean and Commanding Officer of the Military Academy, *Crozier House*, which could accommodate a maximum of 32 students<sup>32</sup>, was 'much better than Wilgenhof, which is, to put it mildly, in a rather dilapidated condition after enduring

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27. SANDFA, AG(3) 223, AG(3)1906/9 vol. 4, Training Officer Western Province Area – AG, 16 August 1955.
  28. SANDFA, KG K39 L67, KG/GM/5/2 vol. 1, minutes of Defence Staff Council (DSC) meeting, 29 August 1955.
  29. SANDFA, AG(3) 224, AG(3)1906/9 vol. 5, Acting Rector SU – Acting AG, 14 November 1955; N.M. Lemmer - G.E. Visser, interview, Saldanha, 1 March 1994.
  30. SANDFA, AG(3) 224, AG(3)1906/9 vol. 6, AG – Registrar SU, 7 August 1956; SANDFA, AG(3) 224, AG(3)1906/9 vol. 6, Registrar SU – AG, 23 August 1956.
  31. SANDFA, KG K43 L81, KG/GPT/1/3/1/1 vol. 4, G/TRG/6/2, Army Chief of Staff – CG, 5 April 1957; De Vos, *Die Militêre Akademie, 1956–1967*, p. 17; N.M. Lemmer - G.E. Visser, interview, Saldanha, 1 March 1994.
  32. SANDFA, Mil. Acad. (Gp. 1) 32, Q/ACCN/1/2 vol. 1, OC Mil. Acad. – QMG, 15 August 1958.

the ravages of five decades of students'.<sup>33</sup> The accommodation of the military students in *Crozier House* proved to be a very satisfactory arrangement and it remained their home until the first-years were also relocated to Saldanha with effect from 1961.<sup>34</sup>

Although the military students were accommodated amongst the civilian students in university residences until the end of 1957, they had more than just the university and residence rules and regulations to deal with as far as their rooms and conduct were concerned; the military authorities laid down their own set of rules and regulations according to the military culture as well. Their rooms had to conform to military standards of neatness at all times, and they were not allowed to keep or display 'photographs, pictures or portraits of indecently dressed glamour-girls'<sup>35</sup> in their rooms. Military first-years were not allowed to go out on weeknights, while the second-years were allowed two weeknights out per month; the third-years apparently faced no restrictions in that regard. The military students could apply for weekend leave (from 10:30 on Saturday until 08:00 on Monday) at the Duty Officer. When they changed into civilian dress after office hours, they had to wear long trousers and a shirt, tie and a jacket at all times. When they participated in sports, they could wear long trousers and a sports shirt; this concession, however, did not apply to spectators! Of course, no 'extravagant clothing such as bright, multicoloured ties, socks and shoes, shoes with buckles or polo neck jerseys' were allowed. All hotels and bars were out of bounds to military students and they were only allowed to drink alcohol – wine and beer only – at functions approved by the Commanding Officer of the Military Academy.<sup>36</sup> It was of course not practically possible to enforce all these rules and regulations all the time and the military students no doubt found ways and means to sidestep some of them when they interfered unduly with the pleasures of student life! Yet, all these rules and regulations were contrary to civilian student culture and made the Academy students stand out as a group, a seemingly 'misplaced' group, on campus.

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33. SANDFA, AG(3) 226, AG(3)1906/9/1 vol. 8, OC Mil. Acad. – AG, 25 September 1957.

34. See SANDFA, Mil. Acad. (Gp. 1) 32, Q/ACCN/1/2 vol. 1, Training Officer Western Province Area – OC Mil. Acad., 14 March 1960.

35. SANDFA, AG(3) 227, AG(3)1906/9 vol. 7, 'Staande Orders vir Militêre Studente', 1957. (Author's translation.)

36. SANDFA, AG(3) 224, AG(3)1906/9 vol. 5, 'Staande Orders vir Eerstejaarkandidaatoffisiere', 1956; SANDFA, AG(3) 224, AG(3)1906/9 vol. 5, 'Staande Orders vir Tweedejaar Militêre Studente', 1956; SANDFA, AG(3) 227, AG(3)1906/9 vol. 7, 'Staande Orders vir Militêre Studente', 1957.

On the positive side, the Academy students joined the residence and university sports clubs at Stellenbosch, unlike in Pretoria where they participated in sports within the military only.<sup>37</sup> This probably promoted the integration and acceptance of the military students on campus; sports participation under the banner of the Military Academy would probably have promoted group formation and could thus have contributed to friction between civilian and military students.

The intention of the military authorities was that the military students should interact freely and cordially with their civilian peers at social level, serving as ambassadors for the UDF and contributing to good civil-military relations.<sup>38</sup> For that very reason, DHQ welcomed the idea in 1955 to spread the military first-years amongst the civilian students in Dagbreek rather than placing them together as a group. As a first-year residence, Dagbreek had special rules and regulations aimed at socialising young, 'irresponsible' students on campus. The military students, who were already in an occupation, had completed a year at the various service gymnasiums and were thus slightly older and marginally more mature than their civilian peers, however, found some of these rules and regulations rather childish and were very reluctant to comply with them. They were also not too keen to accept the traditional rule of senior students over the first-years. Students in uniform were, furthermore, an unfamiliar sight on the Matie campus, which would predictably have elicited reaction from the civilian students. However, the military students, at least in their own perception, elicited more than just good-humoured fun making. They were often the target of disparaging remarks and disrespectful mimicking of their military drills and routines. The military students' tendency to form a distinctive group within Dagbreek despite the efforts to integrate them with the civilian students no doubt aggravated the situation.<sup>39</sup>

The Training Officer of Western Province Area, Lt. A.B. du Preez, proposed in August 1955 that the Academy students be allowed to attend class in civilian dress to make them less conspicuous as a group and to eliminate saluting between the first-years (candidate officers/midshipmen) and the second-years (second lieutenants) on campus. The latter would hopefully have eliminated much of the mocking and mimicking.<sup>40</sup> The military authorities, however, rejected the wearing

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37. Ibid.

38. SANDFA, KG K43 L81, KG/GPT/1/3/1/1 vol. 5, OC Mil. Acad. – CG, 28 May 1957.

39. SANDFA, AG(3) 223, AG(3)1906/9 vol. 4, Training Officer Western Province Area – AG, 16 August 1955.

40. Ibid.

of civilian dress,<sup>41</sup> probably because they feared it would contribute to the ‘civilianisation’ of the military students and the demise of military discipline caused by normal student life in the residences.<sup>42</sup>

No evidence could be found that whatever friction occurred between the military and civilian students had anything to do with what Du Toit called the ‘stigma that the Afrikaner had attached to a soldier’s uniform since the Second World War’.<sup>43</sup> As pointed out earlier, politically motivated violent confrontations between anti-war supporters and soldiers or policemen did take place on the campuses of the traditional Afrikaans universities during the Second World War. In the case of Stellenbosch University, this led, inter alia, to the so-called ‘Battle of Adderley Street’ on 27 July 1940, when Afrikaner students took their anti-war demonstrations to Cape Town and clashed with soldiers and policemen in violent street fights.<sup>44</sup> However, when World War Two veterans were housed in Helderberg, a residence built especially to accommodate them, in 1946,<sup>45</sup> there seems to have been no friction between them and the rest of the student community. Wartime sentiments had certainly not disappeared by that time, but these veterans were no longer members of the UDF and did not stand out as a group because they were not wearing military uniforms. By the mid-1950s, according to the late Prof. Elize Botha, former Chancellor of Stellenbosch University:

Memories of the Second World War were still very strong ... Especially the young men of the 1950s remembered it well. Whatever their politics or view of life was, as the opposition to South Africa’s participation in the war wore off they were in time able to identify with the “Springbucks” (as the soldiers of the South African divisions were called) who participated in the battles in

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41. See SANDFA, KG K39 L67, KG/GM/5/2 vol. 1, minutes of tenth meeting of DSC 29 August 1955, in which the DSC reacted to Du Preez’s other recommendations, but not to those dealing with civilian dress.

42. SANDFA, AG(3) 223, AG(3)1906/9 vol. 4, Training Officer Western Province Area – AG, 16 August 1955.

43. Du Toit, *Moelikeid met die “Army”*, p. 75. (Author’s translation.)

44. H. Giliomee & G. Hendrich, G. 2005. *Die Slag van Andringastrat. Historia* 50(2), November, pp. 179–208; G. Hendrich. 2006. *Die dinamika van blank en bruin verhoudinge op Stellenbosch (1920–1945)*. Unpublished MA thesis, Stellenbosch University, pp. 125–131.

45. P.S. Du Toit. 1966. *Losiesvoorsiening en Studentevoorligting*. In H.B. Thom, *et al.* (eds.). *Stellenbosch 1866–1966: Honderd Jaar Hoër Onderwys*. Cape Town: Nasionale Boekhandel, p. 207.

North Africa ... and subsequently invaded Italy with the British Eighth Army.<sup>46</sup>

Furthermore, at least 85%<sup>47</sup> of the Military Academy students that arrived at Stellenbosch in the mid-1950s were Afrikaans speaking and subscribed to Erasmus's Afrikaner ideals, so there would have been no political friction between them and the mostly Afrikaner-orientated<sup>48</sup> civilian students on campus. Whatever friction arose, sprang from diverging subcultures rather than politics. Just how different and susceptible to conflict the military and student subcultures were, is evident from an observation by the Deputy Commandant General, Maj. Gen. P.H. Grobbelaar in 1960. He stated:

From a military point of view, university students are notoriously undisciplined, untidy, individualistic and liberal in their hair, thought and dress. For the civilian, this is as it should be this freedom of thought and expression stimulates new ideas and research on which depends the vitality of the nation. Nonetheless, it militates against the very tenets of the military structure. The military code, inherent in the structure, is international; it is rigid and dogmatic; it is intransigent and history proves that it can only be ignored at a nation's peril.<sup>49</sup>

### The 'Battle of Wilgenhof'

The records of the UDF and Stellenbosch University do not support Du Toit's claim that the military students' presence 'wrecked the spirit of one residence after the other, [first] Dagbreek, [then] Huis Marais and Huis Visser', followed, finally, by Wilgenhof. Despite the military students' occasional irritation with the behaviour of their civilian peers, an amicable spirit had, according to Col. De Vos, existed between the military and civilian students in Huis Visser and Huis Marais

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46. E. Botha. 1997. Voorwoord: 'n Verhaal van Pik se verhaale. In P. Botha. *Kortverhale*. Pretoria: J.L. van Schaik, p. vii. (Author's translation.)

47. This figure is based upon the name list of the students and telephonic interviews with Dr C.M. Bakkes, a Military History lecturer at the Mil. Acad. at the time and Capt. (SAN) W.H. Kelly, an old student (1955 intake) of the Mil. Acad, 7 July 1999.

48. B. Booyens. 1966. Studentelewe – die Jongste Tydperk. In H.B. Thom, *et al.* (eds.). *Stellenbosch 1866–1966: Honderd Jaar Hoër Onderwys*. Cape Town: Nasionale Boekhandel, pp. 392, 393, 401–402.

49. SANDFA, KG K43 L81, KG/GPT/1/3/1, Deputy CG – CG, 8 February 1960.

during 1956,<sup>50</sup> but the fat was in the fire when the university authorities decided to house the 1957 intake in Wilgenhof. According to old Wilgenhoffer Dirk Kotzé, ‘the two traditions, the military and Wilgenhof, clashed right from the start and a spirit of bitter hostility prevailed throughout the year.’<sup>51</sup> Established in 1903, Wilgenhof was the oldest men’s residence on the Stellenbosch campus and as such had a unique culture and longstanding traditions with which they tolerated no interference.<sup>52</sup> The Wilgenhoffers were extremely dissatisfied with the university for placing the military students in their midst. According to Du Toit, most Wilgenhoffers viewed this as yet another effort by the University ‘to destroy Wilgenhof and everything that it stands for’.<sup>53</sup> This perception apparently originated from the fact that the university authorities had placed a large number of older first-years in Wilgenhof in 1954, who had already worked four or more years and were not prepared to fall in with the customs and traditions of the residence. In 1955 and 1956 the Wilgenhoffers were ‘burdened with Dagbrekers some of whom did not want to be in Wilgenhof and others that were allowed at Stellenbosch on “parole” only’.<sup>54</sup> The arrival of the military students in 1957 was thus the last straw in the eyes of many Wilgenhoffers.

Du Toit’s claim that ‘the Defence Force’s so-called *esprit de corps* and the poor material with which they had to achieve their aims handicapped them’ and that ‘the efforts to make a true student out of a “student officer” failed dismally’ are malicious overstatements. Military *esprit de corps* did lead to group formation amongst the military students, as well as reluctance to subject themselves to some of the customs in their residences, which definitely contributed to the friction. The reference to ‘the poor material’ is based possibly upon the initial poor academic performance of the first-years and their alleged misbehaviour, inter alia ‘the theft of military supplies’<sup>55</sup> by one of them. The fact is that almost 57% of the first two intakes (1955 and 1956) and 75% of the third intake (1957) obtained their degrees, although not all of them within the required three years. It seems as if the high

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50. De Vos, *Die Militêre Akademie, 1956–1967*, p. 17.

51. Kotzé, *Die Geskiedenis van Wilgenhof*, p. 22.

52. See O. Potgieter (ed.). 1968. *Wilgenhof Gedenkboek (1903–1967)*. Stellenbosch: Wilgenhof; see also A.M. Hugo. 1966. Studentelewe, 1866–1939. In H.B. Thom, *et al.* (eds.). *Stellenbosch 1866–1966: Honderd Jaar Hoër Onderwys*. Cape Town: Nasionale Boekhandel, pp. 312–314 and D. Craven. 1949. *Ek speel vir Suid-Afrika*. Kaapstad: Nasionale Pers, p. 15.

53. Du Toit, Moeilikheid met die “Army”, p. 75. (Author’s translation.)

54. *Ibid.*, p. 75.

55. *Ibid.*, p. 79. (Author’s translation.)

dropout rate was due largely to the selection process (too few applications from which to choose) and adaptation problems, because most casualties occurred amongst the first-years. Of the first three intakes (1955 to 1957), 35,48%, 33,33% and 16,66% failed their first-year respectively.<sup>56</sup> The dropout rate of the first two groups (1955 and 1956) was significantly higher than the average of 28,72%<sup>57</sup> for all first-years at South African universities. The 1957 intake's failure rate of 16,66%,<sup>58</sup> however, corresponded with Stellenbosch University's failure rate of 16,4%<sup>59</sup> amongst the civilian first-years. Du Toit's attitude seems to be indicative of extreme prejudice against the military students amongst the Wilgenhoffers. Though the military students might not always have been angels or top achievers, this certainly also applied to their civilian peers.

It is difficult to determine how deep the prejudice against the military students really was and how unpopular they really had been on campus. Due to the military culture, they were possibly perceived to emit a spirit of obstinacy, even superiority, which irritated the civilian students. According to Col. De Vos, the civilian students interpreted the smartness of dress and bearing drilled into the military students during their gymnasium year as mere showing off.<sup>60</sup> It is also possible that the Academy students' better financial position and associated lifestyle elicited a degree of jealousy from the civilian students. There is, nevertheless, no evidence, except on the part of Wilgenhof, of any strong feeling of resentment against the military students. Emeritus History professor, Pieter Kapp, a Dagbreker from that era who attended class with the likes of, subsequently, Maj. Gen. Tienie Groenewald and R. Adm. J.A.C. Weideman, denies the existence of any antagonism or hostility towards the military students amongst the bulk of their civilian peers. The male students just found it a bit irritating that the girls fell much easier for the military students' smart uniforms and proud bearing!<sup>61</sup> Wilgenhof was clearly not too popular on campus, but was, in Du Toit's own words, the residence 'that everybody wanted to

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56. See Mil. Acad. Archives, name lists of Mil. Acad. student intakes and Mil. Acad. graduates.

57. This was the figure for 1954 – see Du Toit. *Losiesvoorsiening en Studentevoorligting*, p. 214.

58. See Mil. Acad. Archives, name lists of Mil. Acad. student intakes and Mil. Acad. graduates.

59. This was the figure for 1955 – see Du Toit. *Losiesvoorsiening en Studentevoorligting*, p. 214.

60. SANDFA, KG K43 L81, KG/GPT/1/3/1/1 vol. 5, OC Mil. Acad. – CG, 28 May 1957.

61. P.H. Kapp – G.E. Visser, e-mail, 17 June 1999.



destroy'.<sup>62</sup> The Wilgenhoffers probably did not resent the military students so much for what they were or did in the first place, but because they were perceived as a tool used by the university authorities to destroy the spirit and identity of their beloved residence.

When it became known during the last quarter of 1956 that the University had decided to house the military students in Wilgenhof in 1957, its House Committee resigned in protest. The University, however, refused to accept their resignations and stood by their decision regarding the placement of the military students.<sup>63</sup> The tension increased significantly when some of the military first-years indicated with their arrival at Wilgenhof on 22 February 1957 that they were not going to subject themselves to the residence's traditional initiation rituals – despite the Army Chief of Staff, Maj. Gen P.H. Grobbelaar's appeal to them before their departure from Pretoria to 'become part of the student life at Stellenbosch as if they were civilians'.<sup>64</sup> Their explanation for this attitude, according to Dr Appies du Toit, was that they had already been initiated at the SA Military College the previous year and that Wilgenhof 'could in any case not initiate them as effective as the men at the Military College'.<sup>65</sup> Senior civilian students aggravated the situation by cajoling military students and pulling at their uniforms.<sup>66</sup> Col. De Vos himself antagonised the Wilgenhoffers further by pointing out to them that 'one was not allowed to "touch" somebody in uniform, or make fun of him, and that his men were selected for leadership roles in future and should thus not be viewed as "ordinary" first-years'.<sup>67</sup> The small group of military students who refused to subject themselves to the initiation process was consequently banished to *Hamelhof*, an annex of Wilgenhof, where they were stigmatised with the status of 'lodgers'. They were allowed into the main building only to have meals or to use the telephone, while their fellow Wilgenhoffers were instructed to ignore them and were prohibited from talking to them.<sup>68</sup>

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62. Du Toit, *Moelikheid met die "Army"*, p. 75. (Author's translation.)

63. SANDFA, KG K43 L81, KG/GPT/1/3/1/1 vol. 4, G/TRG/6/2, Army Chief of Staff – CG, 5 April 1957.

64. Ibid. (Author's translation.)

65. Du Toit, *Moelikheid met die "Army"*, p. 75.

66. SANDFA, KG K43 L81, KG/GPT/1/3/1/1 vol. 4, G/TRG/6/2, Army Chief of Staff – CG, 5 April 1957.

67. Du Toit, *Moelikheid met die "Army"*, p. 75.

68. SANDFA, KG K43 L81, KG/GPT/1/3/1/1 vol. 4, G/TRG/6/2, Army Chief of Staff – CG, 5 April 1957.

Maj. Gen. Grobbelaar hurried to Stellenbosch in person to assess the situation when he was informed about the military students' refusal to subject themselves to the initiation process in Wilgenhof. Unaware of what he subsequently dubbed the 'contra-Biblical' nature of the initiation rituals and anxious to see that the military students were completely integrated into campus life, he expressed his displeasure with their attitude to Col. De Vos. De Vos therefore appealed to the military students to subject themselves to the initiation process in a sporting spirit, trusting that the senior students would not exceed the boundaries for the initiation of first-years laid down by the University. In the end, the military students subjected themselves reluctantly to the initiation process during the second week of the semester, whereupon those 'exiled' to *Hamelhof* were allowed to return to the main building.<sup>69</sup> During the initiation they were *inter alia* forced to drink huge quantities of water to make them vomit for the entertainment of the seniors; concoctions such as aloe juice and raw linseed oil were also prescribed to aid the process.<sup>70</sup> Du Toit boasted that, although the seniors were not allowed to 'touch' the military students, they indeed boxed their ears properly behind the scenes 'with good results'.<sup>71</sup>

Wilgenhof's forty-year old disciplinary system, which was particularly highly regarded by its residents and ex-residents, subsequently brought the slumbering discord between the two groups of students to a head. Col. De Vos was completely unaware of the existence of this disciplinary system due to the strict code of secrecy<sup>72</sup> that the Wilgenhoffers traditionally maintained with regard to everything that took place within the walls of the residence. The disciplinary system entailed that the residence's much-feared disciplinary committee, the Nagligte (Nightlights) paid late-night visits to those that broke the house rules and instructed them to report

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69. Ibid.; SANDFA, AG(3) 227, AG(3)1906/9 vol. 7, OC Mil. Acad. – AG, etc., 16 May 1957; Du Toit, *Moeilikheid met die "Army"*, pp. 75–76.

70. SANDFA, KG K43 L81, KG/GPT/1/3/1/1 vol. 4, G/TRG/6/2, Army Chief of Staff – CG, 5 April 1957.

71. Du Toit, *Moeilikheid met die "Army"*, p. 77.

72. Wilgenhof's traditional inward focus and secrecy continues to this day. When the author learned about the existence of the *Wilgenhof Gedenkboek* (edited by O. Potgieter, Stellenbosch: Wilgenhof, 1968) and the information contained in it w.r.t. the military students' accommodation in the residence, the primarius of *Wilgenhof* denied him access to that publication in their archives; the author was, in fact, not allowed to enter the premises at all. The *Wilgenhof Gedenkboek* is clearly marked 'FOR PRIVATE CIRCULATION ONLY'. (The author eventually borrowed a copy of the publication from an old *Wilgenhoffer* who saw the folly of denying the Military Academy access to part of its own history.)

to the residence's lecture room with towels and soap. There the culprit had to take off his pyjamas by the light of a single torch, whereupon the Nagligte hosed him down with cold water and forced him to chew on a disagreeable aloe mixture. After that, they tarnished his naked body with washable paint, with the size of the painted spots depending upon the gravity of his transgression. After this ritual the Nagligte, who wore Balaclava caps and spoke in squeaky voices to hide their identities, informed the culprit of his transgression and instructed him to wash off the paint with cold water. This entailed standing underneath a cold shower for about half an hour, after which the transgressor was not allowed to dry himself. It was also the custom to administer this punishment to all first-years as a final absolution at the end of their initiation period, a fate from which the military first-years also did not escape. Some of them were physically assaulted during this process (and on subsequent occasions) if they refused to go along; some even had to seek medical treatment afterwards.<sup>73</sup>

Col. De Vos was furious when he heard about the treatment that the Nagligte had dished out to the military students and immediately reported the matter to the Rector. Prof. Thom summoned the House Committee and instructed them to put an end to the activities of the Nagligte immediately. This was followed by a spell of 'strained peace' until the Nagligte pounced upon a couple of military first-years again, inter alia charging them with having 'an attitude'.<sup>74</sup> The military students resisted against this crackdown, whereupon groups of senior students fell upon them in their rooms and beat them up. One of them was kicked in his testicles and had to be treated in hospital.<sup>75</sup> This assault on the first-years unleashed the so-called 'Battle of Wilgenhof'. R. Adm. J.A.C. Weideman, a veteran of that 'battle', subsequently described the 'battle' in a humorous vein:

The Battle of Wilgenhof took place in our third year. The first-years in Wilgenhof were threatened everywhere by their seniors (civilian students). A local reaction force was assembled, which spread the word that force of arms (hockey sticks, etc) would not be excluded

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73. SANDFA, AG(3) 227, AG(3)1906/9 vol. 7, OC Mil. Acad. – AG, etc., 16 May 1957; SANDFA, KG K43 L81, KG/GPT/1/3/1/1 vol. 4, G/TRG/6/2, Army Chief of Staff – CG, 5 April 1957; N.M. Lemmer - G.E. Visser, interview, Saldanha, 1 March 1994.

74. SANDFA, KG K43 L81, KG/GPT/1/3/1/1 vol. 4, G/TRG/6/2, Army Chief of Staff – CG, 5 April 1957; see also Du Toit, *Moeilikheid met die "Army"*, p. 77.

75. SANDFA, AG(3) 227, AG(3)1906/9 vol. 7, OC Mil. Acad. – AG, etc., 16 May 1957; N.M. Lemmer - G.E. Visser, interview, Saldanha, 1 March 1994; see also Du Toit, *Moeilikheid met die "Army"*, p. 79.

when a confrontation took place. At Staff Level (students) a warning plan was worked out in great detail to rush reinforcements to the scene silently and effectively from Huis Marais (third-years) and Huis Visser (second-years). The watchword – “Werda”. On the evening of reckoning, a first-year escaped and called out in great anxiety in front of Huis Marais: “Lieutenant, they are beating up our chaps!” Moments later the same distress call rang out in front of Huis Visser as well – alas, nothing came of the quiet whispering of the call to arms, “Werda”.

The men went into laager underneath the trees in front of the Psychology building and assembled the council of war. Two warriors were sent to call the Colonel [De Vos]. The rest, armed with branches, hockey clubs, etc, departed for Wilgenhof on the double! What a spectacle! Here and there, even a guy with a .303 rifle! Civilian students in a threatening mode, armed with sports equipment! An SA Police van however appeared on the scene [a senior military student had alerted the police<sup>76</sup>] and moments later also Dr Daan [Dr Danie Craven], the Colonel and members of the academic staff. A high-level summit followed and the situation was defused. At Huis Marais, the [civilian] students were disappointed that they were not invited to participate in the battle against Wilgenhof. Joyful years indeed!<sup>77</sup>

Dr D.H. (Danie) Craven, head of the Physical Education department at Stellenbosch University and legendary South African Springbok rugby boss, was Wilgenhof’s housemaster. As a Wilgenhof old boy himself, who captained the Nagligte in 1933 and was primarius of the residence in 1935, Craven was a sturdy supporter of Wilgenhof’s customs and traditions.<sup>78</sup> If he was a seasoned Wilgenhoffer, Craven was also not unfamiliar with the military either. As a former schoolteacher, he had served as a Lieutenant in the School Cadets from 1924 to 1928

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76. SANDFA, AG(3) 227, AG(3)1906/9 vol. 7, OC Mil. Acad. – AG, etc., 16 May 1957.

77. J.A.C. Weideman. 1980. Herinneringe. *Military Academy Annual 1980*, p. 24. (Author’s translation.)

78. N. Zondagh. 1968. Die Nagligte. In O. Potgieter (ed.). *Wilgenhof Gedenkboek (1903–1967)*. Stellenbosch: Wilgenhof, pp. 34–36; M. de Villiers. 1968. Register van Wilgenhoffers (1903–1967). In O. Potgieter (ed.). *Wilgenhof Gedenkboek (1903–1967)*. Stellenbosch: Wilgenhof, p. 136; Craven, *Ek speel vir Suid-Afrika*, pp. 15; 228.

and joined the SA Permanent Force on 1 April 1938. He served consecutively as Director of Physical Education and Cultural Affairs<sup>79</sup> and as the Commanding Officer of the Physical Training Battalion, rising to the rank of Lieutenant Colonel, before he left the UDF in 1946 for the Department of Education.<sup>80</sup> But that was the pre-1948 UDF and did not necessarily spell support for Erasmus's Afrikaner-dominated defence force. It is a well-known fact that Erasmus had replaced many Smuts supporters in the officers' corps, particularly the top hierarchy of the UDF, with politically correct candidates to carry out his transformation of the UDF, which had estranged many white South Africans from the UDF.<sup>81</sup> Whatever the case, Craven's support of and loyalty to Wilgenhof and its traditions clearly outweighed any affinity that he might have had for the UDF by far.

On his arrival at Wilgenhof that evening, Dr Craven told Col. De Vos 'who was the boss at Wilgenhof and what he [De Vos] could do with his mouth',<sup>82</sup> which was perhaps typical of the attitude of the Wilgenhoffers, but at the same time also expressed their disgruntlement with De Vos's interference in residence affairs. After this skirmish, Wilgenhof's House Committee put every member of the residence, military and civilian, individually before the choice of subjecting themselves in future to either the Nagligte or a system of fines. All military students chose the system of fines, but the civilian students all opted to stick with the Nagligte.<sup>83</sup> Col. De Vos claims that the dust settled gradually and that a better relationship developed between the two groups of students as time passed. The military students abided by the house rules and dutifully carried out the routine tasks traditionally allotted to all first-years, such as fetching the mail, answering the telephone and serving tea to the seniors in their rooms every evening at 21:30. They were also absorbed into Wilgenhof's sports teams and several of them, inter alia, represented their residence on the rugby field.<sup>84</sup> Du Toit, however, contradicts De Vos's version of the course of events after the 'Battle of Wilgenhof'. He summarises the course of events (probably correctly) as follows:

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79. Author's translation of 'Direkteur van Liggaamsopvoeding en Kultuurwese'.

80. SANDFA, Personnel Records, P1/8601/1, D.H. Craven.

81. Visser, British influence on military training and education in South Africa, p. 75; R.C. Hiemstra. 2001. *Die Wilde Haf*. Cape Town, Johannesburg and Pretoria: Human & Rousseau, pp. 229–231, 256–260.

82. Du Toit, Moeilikheid met die "Army", p. 79.

83. SANDFA, AG(3) 227, AG(3)1906/9 vol. 7, OC Mil. Acad. – AG, etc., 16 May 1957; see also Du Toit, Moeilikheid met die "Army", p. 79.

84. SANDFA, AG(3) 227, AG(3)1906/9 vol. 7, OC Mil. Acad. – AG, etc., 16 May 1957.

The group [of military students] was for all practical purposes ignored for the remainder of the year. They were punished through the system of fines, which was applied quite harshly. Fines were high and frequent and not even the slightest transgression was overlooked. They, furthermore, did not participate in any Wilgenhof or student activities, except for a few that played rugby ... we were glad to see them leave at the end of the year and they did not seem sorry to see the last of us either.<sup>85</sup>

With the departure of the military students, the Wilgenhoffers practically erased that unpleasant chapter from their history by crossing out the names of all the military students in their so-called 'Big Book', the perpetually updated name list of Wilgenhoffers, 'because they never were, or wanted to be, Wilgenhoffers'.<sup>86</sup> A later generation of Wilgenhoffers, however, re-entered the name of one of them, Hannes Botha, into the 'Big Book' when he obtained national ('Springbuck') colours in rugby!<sup>87</sup>

The conflict with Wilgenhof did in all probability not reflect the general relationship between the military and civilian students on the Stellenbosch campus by 1957. Indications are that the relationship with the rest of the student community was satisfactory. Wilgenhof's prejudice, 'xenophobia' and traditional disciplinary system, which they applied to the slightly older military first-years with a vengeance was mostly to blame for the conflict. However, the relationship would certainly have been better if the military authorities, particularly Col. De Vos (admittedly on the insistence of DHQ), had not been so over-protective and did not make a fuss over every small complaint by the first-years. This interference fuelled the obstinacy of the military students, polarised the two groups and prevented the military authorities from achieving their goal of the complete integration of the military students into the student community and campus life. It furthermore robbed the 1957 military first-years of an enjoyable student life and the opportunity to concentrate on their studies without unnecessary disruptions. It also damaged the image of the UDF amongst at least a portion of the University community, exactly the opposite of what Erasmus and DHQ had in mind.

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85. Du Toit, *Moelikheid met die "Army"*, p. 79. (Author's translation.)

86. *Ibid.*

87. Du Toit, *Moelikheid met die "Army"*, p. 76.

The initiative to accommodate the military students separately, in Crozier House, as from 1958 came from the University,<sup>88</sup> but it is not clear whether the Wilgenhof debacle had anything to do with it. It might, of course, be an indication that the University had decided on the grounds of the Wilgenhof affair that the military and residence cultures were too diverging to accommodate under one roof. On the other hand, it could have originated from practical considerations, because it made the administration and military routine of the Academy students much simpler. Whatever the case, the military authorities readily agreed to this arrangement,<sup>89</sup> because apart from the practical benefits it offered, DHQ was certainly eager to avoid further conflict to protect the public image of the UDF and to promote sound public relations. Whatever the case, the Crozier House option seems to have worked well, since there is no evidence of further conflict between the civilian and military students.

## Conclusion

The perceived 'Britishness' of the UDF since its inception in 1912, its internal employment to suppress Afrikaner unrest and its external application to serve perceived British interests in two world wars, alienated many Afrikaners from the UDF. After the National Party victory of 1948, Defence Minister F.C. Erasmus did everything in his power to lure the Afrikaner back to the UDF and to popularise the UDF amongst the general public, especially the Afrikaner section. In this endeavour, he saw the Military Academy as a useful instrument. His vision was that Academy graduates, dedicated to his Afrikaner ideals, would gradually saturate the officers' corps to the highest level and create an Afrikaner-dominated UDF. The achievement of a university degree would furthermore put future officers at the same level as professionals in the civilian sector, while the Academy students would act as ambassadors for the emerging 'Afrikanerised' UDF on campus to popularise it amongst the civilian leaders of the future. However, these objectives were all secondary to the main aim of the Military Academy, namely the provision of adequately qualified officers to lead the UDF in the technologically and socio-politically complex nuclear age.

Inefficient student selection resulting from a too small recruitment pool produced a high dropout rate amongst the military first-years at Stellenbosch initially, but by 1957 they were on par with the average of the University. The Academy students thus adapted satisfactorily to university studies and were

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88. SANDFA, Mil. Acad. (Gp. 1) 32, Q/ACCN/1/2 vol. 1, OC Mil. Acad. – Registrar SU, 15 August 1957.

89. Ibid.

academically no worse than the average civilian student. The diverging military and student cultures did create the potential for conflict on the campuses of the Universities of Pretoria and Stellenbosch in that the discipline and dogma of military culture was dissonant with liberal student culture. The military routine, the *esprit the corps* and group forming by the Academy students and their relative 'insensitiveness' towards student customs and traditions on the one hand, and the civilian students' occasional mockery of military behaviour on the other, indeed created some friction. Generally speaking, however, the two groups got along well on both the Pretoria and Stellenbosch campuses. The detachment of the Military Academy from the University of Pretoria and its affiliation with Stellenbosch University was informed by organisational considerations within the UDF and not by any conflict between the civilian and military students at the former institution.

Although there were minor, reciprocal irritations and frustrations between the military and civilian students in Dagbreek, Huis Visser and Huis Marais during 1955 and 1956, no serious conflict occurred. The only significant military-civilian confrontation at Stellenbosch was the clash between the Academy students and the Wilgenhoffers in 1957. This conflict did not arise from political differences, but from the strongly diverging student and military cultures. The *esprit the corps* of the Academy students, their perceived attitude of superiority, the military authorities' constant interference in residence affairs and the refusal of the military first-years to subject themselves, as all their civilian peers did, to some of Wilgenhof's time-honoured customs and traditions certainly contributed significantly to the conflict. Few, if any student residences would have allowed first-years to trample on their traditions. But Wilgenhof's traditional 'xenophobia' and inaccessibility to outsiders, together with its peculiar spirit and traditions played an equally important role. This was exacerbated by the perception amongst the Wilgenhoffers that the university authorities were out to destroy the spirit of their residence by repeatedly placing 'undesirable elements' in their midst. As an extremely loyal old boy, Craven's vigorous support of the Wilgenhoffers and their traditions, ostensibly with little regard for the military students, despite his (however limited) military background, helped to fuel the fire. However disappointing and counterproductive the clash between the Academy students and their civilian peers in Wilgenhof was for all parties involved, it did not have a lasting, negative impact upon the relations between the Academy and Stellenbosch University and the two student communities.

Dr Appies Du Toit was correct in observing that the Academy played a role in the National Party's efforts to popularise the UDF amongst the Afrikaner and to elevate military officers to the same level as professionals in the civilian sector. His claims that the University of Pretoria kicked the military students out, that the



military students were of inferior quality, morally and academically, that they caused trouble wherever they went and that their presence 'wrecked' the spirit of one university residence after the other at Stellenbosch is totally unfounded. Such claims flow from his loyalty to Wilgenhof and its traditions and his desire to justify the actions of his beloved old residence.